



## **CELEBRATING BERKELEY'S JAPANESE AMERICAN HISTORY**

- WHEREAS,** Japanese immigrants began settling in Berkeley in the 1880s and by the onset of WWII, over 1,300 Japanese Americans called Berkeley home; and
- WHEREAS,** Japanese Americans, along with other people of color, were restricted to housing in Berkeley's Southwest neighborhoods, but Nikkei businesses were found scattered throughout Berkeley's neighborhoods, and
- WHEREAS,** Berkeley housed scores of Japanese American businesses and community organizations by 1940, but Executive Order 9066 violently disrupted this thriving community, forcing all people of Japanese ancestry out of the West Coast; and
- WHEREAS,** Christian churches and Buddhist temples have historically served as centers for the Japanese American community, a place in which Japanese immigrants and their children could gather and preserve traditional cultural practices, as well as playing critical roles during the WWII and resettlement years, first as a location for storing members' belongings and later as a hostel for families returning from internment camps; and
- WHEREAS,** unlike most pre-war Japantowns, which were erased by the effects of WWII, many of Berkeley's Japanese Americans returned from being incarcerated in internment camps and began to rebuild their lives and connections to the community and Berkeley's Nikkei community actually increased after the war; and
- WHEREAS,** due to the fact that the Berkeley Japanese community recovered and thrived after WWII, Berkeley has retained an unusually high number of its historic Japanese American churches in their original locations, including the Berkeley Methodist United Church, Berkeley Buddhist Temple and Higashi Honganji Buddhist Temple, which have been an important foundation for Berkeley's Nikkei community for a century now and continue to serve as the heart of the Japanese American community; and

**WHEREAS,** today, the Japanese American churches continue to provide worship service, religious education, youth leadership, senior programs, community sports, summer festivals, and other spiritual, cultural and social activities for the community; and

**WHEREAS,** the California Japanese American Community Leadership Council's *Preserving California's Japantowns* project was developed to reclaim the stories of buildings and landscapes that made up California's Japantowns, including dozens that declined and even disappeared following WWII, which is an urgent task since the Nisei who recall Japantowns of their youth are in the last years of their lives; and

**WHEREAS,** under the guidance and leadership of Project Director and Berkeley resident, Donna Graves, and Project Manager, Jill Shiraki, *Preserving California's Japantowns* has made an important contribution to the City of Berkeley and our community's heritage by identifying over 60 historical structures still in place that are associated with Berkeley's thriving pre-war Japanese American community; and


**WHEREAS,** the *Preserving California's Japantowns* project has raised awareness of this chapter of Berkeley's history and has shared project research with Berkeley's Landmark Preservation Commission that can now be used to make more informed decisions about development and preservation in our community; and

**WHEREAS,** while many of California's historic Japantowns have had nearly all physical traces erased, Berkeley is fortunate to have a high number of extant historic structures, which provide a tangible link to a significant part of our community's diverse heritage and a reminder of one of the most shameful chapters in American history that must never be forgotten.

**NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that I, Mayor Tom Bates,** on behalf of the City of Berkeley celebrate

**Berkeley's Japanese American Community,  
Berkeley's Historic Japanese American Churches and Temples, and  
The Preserving California's Japantowns Project**

for Japanese American's cultural contributions to American history, to historic Japanese American churches and temples for their role in supporting the Japanese American community, and to the *Preserving California's Japantowns* project for helping to document and preserve this history by identifying historically significant structures in California's Japanese American History.

  
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Tom Bates  
Mayor



January 29, 2008